

I'm Only Sleeping by **CherishIsTheWord**

Series: [Mike & Eleven Slice of Life \[6\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Allusions to Nancy and Steve, F/M, Fluff, Love, Romantic Fluff

Language: English

Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Holly Wheeler, Karen Wheeler, Mike Wheeler

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-09-28

Updated: 2017-09-28

Packaged: 2022-04-02 01:42:05

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,568

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

El wonders why Mike can't sleep in the basement with her, and Mike desperately tries to explain.

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Author's Note:

I definitely wanted to get in at least one more fluff piece before season 2 arrives, so hope you enjoy! Hints for the new season seem to be dropping fast and it's harder to ignore where things may be headed.

December 1984

Eleven had not been back even two months yet, but it seemed like so much had happened. Not that they were going on adventures quite as crazy as the previous year – far from it – but El was finally starting to learn more about what she had missed out on her whole life. She began to understand all the amazing things in the world and places to go. The many stories she hadn't heard also fascinated her to no end. Most of all though, she was developing attachments to people in her life for the first time. Not a contrived one like she had with Papa, but honest, genuine attachments. At the center of that was El finding out what Mike means to her. They really only had eyes for each other, and now El had words to describe it – they were boyfriend and girlfriend. They made an adorable or disgusting pair, depending on who you asked.

There was the added complication that they were now officially housemates too. Karen was, as a result, a tad more watchful with what was going on in her house than she had been in the past. Just a tad, but Mike was keenly aware of it. Still, he looked at his minor loss of freedom as more than a fair exchange if it meant having El around.

With winter inching closer day by day, the nights were getting colder. That was especially true for the basement, a cozy place to hang out that now also happened to be El's room. It's also where Mike and El found themselves for yet another evening. With a video store having arrived in Hawkins that year, their favourite activity to do together was watch movies. They would each take turns choosing. Mike had the opportunity to introduce El to all the classics she had missed out on. El, on the other hand, based her choices primarily on

which cover art stood out to her, leading to some very eclectic movie experiences for the two of them (that night's was the live-action Popeye).

Seemingly knowing just when the movie would be over, Karen called down from upstairs. "Michael, El, it's getting late. You should head to bed," she called.

"Fine, Mom," Mike called back.

Just as he said, Mike went to get up when he felt a tug on his sleeve.

"Sleep down here?" El asked sweetly.

Mike hated saying no to El, but he was well aware of the wrath he might face if he accepted her request. "Um, I'd love to El, but I don't know if that would be such a good idea."

"Why not?"

"My mom and dad would kill me if they found us in the same bed. We can't." It was the truth. He didn't want to jeopardize the privileges he had already earned to spend so much time with El.

El furrowed her brow. She didn't really understand what was so bad about sleeping in the same bed. She thought falling asleep in his arms would be a nice thing.

"Remember, if you ever get lonely or need anything you can reach me on the walkie talkie. I'll see you in the morning, okay El?"

Though not completely convinced, she accepted his answer for the night, not wanting to get him in trouble. She offered him a smile. "Good night, Mike."

The next morning, Mike and El were enjoying breakfast along with Karen and Holly. Ted was sleeping in, as he always liked to do on Saturdays, while Nancy, to Karen's dismay, had decided at the last minute to stay over with friends. As Karen stepped out of the room, Mike was thrown by a point blank question from El.

"Why can't we sleep together?" She asked.

With that, Mike fumbled with his knife and fork as they came crashing down onto his plate. Holly giggled at his clumsiness, while El remained fixated on her question.

"Everything okay in there?" Karen shouted from the other room.

"Yes, Mom!" he answered. Mike then whispered to El. "We'll talk about this later, okay?" Mike glanced over to Holly and raised his index finger to his mouth, letting her know to keep what she might have heard a secret as well. Fortunately for Mike, Holly even at her young age followed the Wheeler sibling tradition of never keeping their mother informed.

The later that Mike alluded to would happen that afternoon. This time, El had joined Mike in his room, who was working away at his next campaign plans. She liked how passionate he got coming up with ideas.

"Is now good?" El chimed.

"Huh?" Mike asked.

"Talk later," she reminded him.

"Oh, sure, El." He shoved his work aside. As focused as he got on his campaign, he never wanted to leave El hanging, and this topic clearly seemed to be bothering her.

El didn't say anything more; she was waiting for Mike's patented explanation that he was always so good at conveying in a gentle, patient way.

"I'm sorry about last night. It's just, my parents would have freaked," he began.

"They sleep in the same bed," she brought up, finding it a bit hypocritical of them.

"That's because they're married."

"Nancy and Steve too," she mentioned matter-of-factly.

Her second example caught Mike a bit off-guard. He didn't think his mom would allow Nancy to stay over at Steve's. "Wait, how do you know that? Is that where she was last night?"

El shrugged. "Nancy. On the phone. Said she slept with Steve."

"Well, they probably didn't do much sleeping," Mike blurted out, immediately regretting his words.

"No?" El asked.

Trying to prevent himself from going down that rabbit hole, he offered a more complete explanation. "Never mind, El, it was just a dumb joke. But they're older, and you see how upset my mom gets when Nancy spends too much time with him. She would never allow Steve to stay overnight at our house."

El took a beat to take in Mike's explanation, but it was clear the gears were still turning in her head. "Your mom. Sleeps with Holly sometimes," El pressed on.

Mike sighed, finding it difficult to explain the different circumstances of these examples. El could tell he was getting flustered.

"I'm sorry, Mike," she offered.

"No, I'm sorry El. It's just hard to explain, that's all."

"Ask Nancy instead?"

"Uh, no, no, no, don't go to Nancy." As much as he found this topic difficult for him, Mike could only imagine how it would look if El bluntly asked, as she was prone to do, about sleeping with people to Nancy. Especially if she knew El had already spoken with him about it. Maybe being straight-forward would be the best policy after all.

"Okay, so we're boyfriend and girlfriend," Mike started. El nodded along and smiled at the thought.

"Parents don't want boyfriends and girlfriends to sleep in the same

bed," he explained.

"Why not?"

"They would worry we'd kiss and stuff."

"Stuff?"

"Nothing we need to worry about yet," he offered back. That question terrified him a little bit, so he was a bit surprised by his own composure.

El let that question go but immediately followed up with another. "What's wrong with kissing?" Becoming increasingly affectionate since her return, she took this opportunity to kiss his cheek.

"Uh, nothing." He was blushing now.

El gave it some more thought. "What if we promise not to?" she wondered.

"Well, I don't know if I can promise that. Can you?" This time, El blushed as she shrugged to his question, causing Mike to smirk. "And besides, they certainly wouldn't believe us," he added.

"Oh."

"I'm just happy you're living here and we get to spend so much time together. I guess I don't want to mess that up."

"Okay, thank you, Mike." El accepted what Mike was saying, even if she was still a little disappointed.

"Some day we will. Just maybe not quite yet." The two exchanged a smile, and that seemed to be the end of it.

But try as they might, it wouldn't be long until they accidentally broke that rule – just a week later, during another movie night, in fact. They ended up falling asleep in each other's arms part way through El's next choice of movie, the extremely long *Gone with the Wind*. When Karen stumbled upon the scene, she was perhaps a little

more understanding in the moment than she would ever let on. She didn't have the heart to disturb the two of them when they looked so innocent and peaceful together.

As for the other topic that Mike brushed right past, well, that wouldn't go completely unanswered to El for long either. Mike loved explaining most things to El, and El always wanted to hear it from Mike most of all. But, there were always topics he didn't know that well himself or was too embarrassed to cover. That's where her "Big Book of Questions & Answers" came in, helping her to learn about all kinds of things in the world. One day, she reached the chapter about "love", one she had been looking forward to. It was a little more revelatory than she was expecting, but as usual she was eager to share her new insights with her boyfriend. Needless to say, Mike had a bit of a love-hate relationship with that book.